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Nathaniel Winsor House: A Window to the Past

By ANNE SCHROEDER



David Beal

Amid the sparkling new appointments of each room in the Nathaniel Winsor House are the stories of its past ... forever entwined in what is now the headquarters of the Duxbury Rural and Historical Society. Showhouse tours will run daily from 11 am - 4 pm through June 21.

On Saturday, after months of meticulous preparation and wonderful artistry of designers and tradesmen, and the dedication of many devoted and hard-working volunteers who manned the entire effort, the doors to the Nathaniel Winsor House (the Leonard House) opened to the public for grand tours. Gone is the Leonard's suit of armor that stood guard in the foyer on the other side of the front door. Gone, though not forgotten, are the multitude of collections that chronicled Mrs. Leonard's life as an avid flea market shopper and beholder of treasures. Mrs. Leonard's grandson, Chuck Leonard, who lives with his wife Harriet on Weston Rd. recalls that his grandmother had an eye for collectibles. Said Chuck, "She had the uncanny ability of picking up a rare china dish missing its cover, and then years later finding the matching top."

The 9-bedroom home had served for many years as a bed and breakfast. Former guests include Buckminster Fuller, inventor of the geodesic dome, and Margaret Hamilton, the Wicked Witch of the West in *The Wizard of Oz*. Recalled Chuck, "Gaga" (a name Dr. Leonard coined by the first grandchild, Jay Jones) would make breakfast to order for their bed and breakfast guests." Dr. Edwin Leonard was an ophthalmologist and stockbroker, who worked from home. His office was on the 2nd floor above the dining room, overlooking the harbor, a room not presently open. Chuck said of his grandparents, "I don't know who was sweeter. It was always pleasant to visit them."

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Prior to the arrival of the Leonard family, the home was occupied by many families. At the end of the 19th century, it was a hotel called "The Colonial Inn."

David Beal, an interior designer from Brookline and Greenwich, CT, and one of the 21 interior designers renovating the home, has his own story to tell. He is the great-great-nephew of Nathaniel Winsor. He spent the night before his wedding at the Leonard home. He and his wife, Emily, spent their wedding night there. David devoted his workmanship to the dining room. Said David, "While most of the house was built in 1807, the dining room was built even earlier. It would have been the center of the home's activities, and I wanted to create a room reminiscent of its earlier use, where the family gathered not just for meals, but for relaxation and conversation." The room has been cleared of the exquisite mahogany furnishings of Mrs. Leonard's era, with their elaborate collections displayed on every surface. Beal has tastefully streamlined the room to reflect a simpler period. He created a sitting area at one end of the dining room combining old and new, reflecting the Federal period with its period paper-backed Scalamandre fabric wall covering.

Some of the family heirlooms displayed in the dining room were original to The Winsor House Inn on Washington St. Nancy Winsor, David's great-great-grandmother and the sister of Nathaniel Winsor, married Nathaniel Beal, and they lived in what is now The Winsor House. Among these possessions are the tilt-top tea table, the pink floral china and a cruet set, c. 1810. "The cruet set," David said, "was made at a time when there was a shortage of silver, so silver dollars were melted down to make the cruet stand." Of his great-great-grandmother, David said, "She labeled everything; each heirloom is dated and identified." The floor was always painted," said David. Artist Kay Brennan of Boston designed an exquisite floor design echoing the wall's pattern's Federal urns and columns. The color yellow of

the wall covering hints of exterior color of the home which has always been yellow.

Last week, a Winsor descendent who was visiting Duxbury from Houston, TX was directed to his contemporary and relation, David Beal, at the Nathaniel Winsor House, where the 2 met for the first time and were photographed in front of the Winsor family china.

Duxbury Rural & Historical Society President Judy Hall spoke of the home as it was in February after it had purchased by the organization. "It had deteriorated," she said. "It was a very sad home." She went on to say that the exciting thing about this endeavor is the dedication of the many volunteers who have donated countless hours of their time and effort, as well as the generosity local tradesmen, who, together, have "brought the house back to life." The participating interior designers from Duxbury are Nels Andersen of Nels F. Andersen Decorating, Stacie Colbeth of The Yellow House, Constance Gallison and Cynthia Robson of Gallison & Robson Interiors, Victoria Hokenson of Interiors by Victoria, Janet Johnson of Janet Allen Interiors and Lee Barlow, Associate, Scott Kulda of Timeless Designs, Inc., Catherine Lanuto of Catherine Lanuto Interiors, Julia Lizza Interiors, Tris Nuland of Grapevine Interiors, Susan Lougee Thomas of The Paint Puddle, and Elizabeth Wiese of Elizabeth Wiese Interiors. Duxbury landscape designers who donated their time and talent included Peggy Connors of Connors Landscape Design Inc., Anne Fenwick of Garden Vignettes, William Richmond of Richmond Landscape Design, and Ann Sheridan of Duxbury Gardeners.

Mrs. Alice Hoyt of Abrams Hill, she believes, the oldest member of the Duxbury Yacht Club, donated the custom fence that surrounds the property. Mrs. Hoyt recalled the Tweed family, who rented the Nathaniel Winsor house in the early 1920's and visiting their home as a teenager. "It was lovely home, very stately and newly restored." She had become friendly with the daughter of the Tweeds, a girl of about 16 or 17 and her brother, a student at Harvard. Coincidentally, according to Judy Hall, Walpole Fence Company contacted a distributor of Port Orford, a type of cedar found in Oregon. The man who secured the Port Orford for the Nathaniel Winsor House is the son of Joanne Leonard Youse, the daughter of Dr. and Mrs. Edwin Leonard. The cedar was for the fence around his grandfather's former home.



Descendants of Nathaniel Winsor, Grace Peterson Beal, David Beal's mother and Doris Minette Beal of Standish Shore and David Beal's "Aunt Dot" taken in front of her home overlooking Duxbury Bay.

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Several years ago, the old barn was a dilapidated warehouse of old tools, old beds, books and miscellaneous odds and ends. Under the direction of chairwoman Mary Ott of Chesnut St. and Nancy Bennett of Hicks Point Rd., and their committee, the barn has transformed into the Seaside Boutique, with all of the ambience and charm of an English cottage. Included in the menagerie of gift and home items are lamps, pottery, rugs, needlepoint pillows, mirrors, liens, wreaths, birdhouses, antique furniture and delightful niceties. Among the 30 merchants displaying their goods, the main merchants are Dillon and Company of Plymouth, Elegant Entrances of Hanover and La Ruche of Newbury Street in Boston. For an added touch, a catered cafe will be available to serve lunch and afternoon tea under a tent, after touring the estate.

Taking a step toward the future, the home, once the quiet abode of first the Winsor family and eventually, the Leonard family, and all those in between, is now the headquarters of the society that will continue to spin and treasure the stories within the walls of this 19th century home. A new story has begun.



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